

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 08284

USDOE FOR BILLY HILL

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TGEN, ENRG, SWEL, UR

SUBJECT: REPORTED NEW COAL DISCOVERIES IN THE KARAGANDA
BASIN; BACKGROUND ON FEBRUARY 20 KARAGANDA MINE DISASTER

REF: MOSCOW 2661

1. A WEEKEND VISIT (APRIL 15-16), THE FIRST BY AN AMERI-
CAN DIPLOMAT TO THE NEWLY-OPENED CITY OF KARAGANDA, PRO-
DUCED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT COAL DISCOVERIES IN
NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN AND THE FEBRUARY 20
EXPLOSION (REFTEL) IN THE "SOKURSKAYA" MINE.

2. THE FUTURE OF COAL MINING IN THE KARAGANDA BASIN.
ACCORDING TO SEVERAL LOCAL SOURCES, INCLUDING A MINING
ENGINEER FROM THE INSTITUTE OF FERROUS METALLURGY, THE
DEEP SEAMS TO THE WEST OF KARAGANDA ARE NEARLY EXHAUSTED
AND WILL PROBABLY CEASE BEING EXPLOITED WITHIN THE NEXT
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THREE TO FIVE YEARS. PRODUCTION OF COAL, HOWEVER, WILL
CONTINUE TO GROW BECAUSE OF NEW DISCOVERIES OF RICH SEAMS
40 KILOMETERS TO THE EAST OF KARAGANDA AND CONTINUED
EXPLOITATION OF THE OPEN FIELDS AT EKIBASTUZ NORTHEAST
OF KARAGANDA.

3. THE FEBRUARY 20, 1978, MINING DISASTER. ACCORDING TO

THE MINING ENGINEER, AN EXPLOSION OCCURRED DEEP IN THE "SOKURSKAYA" MINE BECAUSE DEEP MINING OPERATIONS THERE SET OFF UNDETECTED POCKETS OF METHANE GAS. THE MINE'S MANAGEMENT, HE CLAIMED HAD NEGLECTED NORMAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS, INCLUDING EXPLORATORY DRILLING FOR METHANE, IN AN EFFORT TO EXPEDITE PRODUCTION OF COAL. IN THE ENSUING EXPLOSION, MANY MINERS WERE KILLED. BECAUSE NO EXACT FIGURES HAD BEEN PUBLISHED, THE MINING ENGINEER COULD NOT BE MORE SPECIFIC BUT HE STATED THAT INFORMED LOCAL SOURCES CLAIMED THAT THE DEATH TOLL HAD EXCEEDED 100. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE ON THE MINES TO INCREASE THEIR OUTPUT OF COAL. SAFETY PROCEDURES ARE SOMETIMES DISREGARDED AS A CONSEQUENCE AND ACCIDENTS FREQUENTLY OCCUR, THOUGH SELDOM ON THE SCALE OF THE FEBRUARY 20 EXPLOSION. TOON

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